

# from Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass by Frederick Douglass

## BEFORE YOU READ

### LITERARY FOCUS: METAPHOR

Writers use metaphors to help us see things in new, imaginative ways. A **metaphor** is a figure of speech that makes a comparison between two things that are basically unlike. Metaphors, unlike similes, do not use the words *like*, *as*, or *resembles*.

A poet, for example, describes the moon by saying, "The moon was a ghostly galleon." This metaphor compares the moon moving across the night sky to a sailing ship. Another writer might express the metaphor differently and say, "The moon sails across the sky."

As you near the end of this selection, look for a powerful metaphor. In it, Douglass compares a personal victory to coming back from the dead: "It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom." By connecting a physical victory with a victory of the soul, this metaphor helps readers understand the depth of Douglass's feelings.



#### Reading Standard 2.4

Make warranted and reasonable assertions about the author's arguments by using elements of the text to defend and clarify interpretations.

#### Reading Standard 3.4

Analyze ways in which poets use figures of speech to evoke readers' emotions.

#### Reading Standard 3.8

Analyze the clarity and consistency of political assumptions in a selection of literary works or essays on a topic.

### READING SKILLS: ANALYZING A WRITER'S PURPOSE

Frederick Douglass clearly states his purpose in the first paragraph of this excerpt. To make his point clear and dramatic, he uses narration and description. He uses narration to tell us about a series of related events. He uses descriptive language to help us imagine his pain.

**Use the Skill** As you read, look for ways in which Douglass uses narration and description to describe the horrors of slavery. You will notice that Douglass also uses some powerful metaphors to describe his experience.



Frederick Douglass.

Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pennsylvania.

# from Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass

## Frederick Douglass

Frederick Douglass was born into slavery. Soon after his birth, Douglass was separated from his mother. At the age of eight, he was sent to Baltimore to work as a house servant. Later he was sent to the country to work in the fields. This selection describes an event that happened when Douglass was sixteen years old. At that time, Douglass was “owned” by a man named Thomas. Another man, Mr. Covey, had paid Thomas to use Douglass for one year.

### The Battle with Mr. Covey

I have already **intimated** that my condition was much worse, during the first six months of my stay at Mr. Covey’s, than in the last six. The circumstances leading to the change in Mr. Covey’s course toward me form an epoch<sup>1</sup> in my humble history. You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man. On one of the hottest days of the month of August, 1833, Bill Smith, William Hughes, a slave named Eli, and myself, were engaged in fanning wheat.<sup>2</sup> Hughes was clearing  
10 the fanned wheat from before the fan, Eli was turning, Smith was feeding, and I was carrying wheat to the fan. The work was simple, requiring strength rather than intellect; yet, to one entirely unused to such work, it came very hard.

About three o’clock of that day, I broke down; my strength failed me; I was seized with a violent aching of the head, attended with extreme dizziness; I trembled in every limb. Finding what was coming, I nerved myself up, feeling it would never do

#### VOCABULARY

**intimated** (in’tə·māt’·id) *v.*: stated indirectly; hinted.

#### AUTHOR’S PURPOSE

In lines 2–7, Douglass describes his purpose for writing. Describe this purpose in your own words.

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#### CLARIFY

What happens to Douglass while he is fanning wheat (lines 14–20)?

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From *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave Written by Himself*, edited by Benjamin Quarles. Copyright © 1960, 1988 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Published by The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., pg. 97-105. Reprinted by permission of Harvard University Press.

1. **epoch** (ep’ək) *n.*: noteworthy period of time.
2. **fanning wheat**: separating out usable grain.

### WORD STUDY

A *treading yard* (line 24) was an area where wheat was separated into usable grain. The name comes from the verb *tread*, which means “step on” or “walk over.” After the wheat was spread, horses walked over it to separate the usable grains.

### INTERPRET

Underline the main events Douglass narrates in lines 32–46. Would you describe Douglass’s **tone** as angry or emotional?

### VOCABULARY

**comply** (kəm·plī) v.: obey; agree to a request.

### IDENTIFY

Pause at line 48. What does Douglass decide to do for the first time in his life? Circle the answer.

to stop work. I stood as long as I could stagger to the hopper with grain. When I could stand no longer, I fell, and felt as if  
20 held down by an immense weight. The fan of course stopped; everyone had his own work to do; and no one could do the work of the other, and have his own go on at the same time.

Mr. Covey was at the house, about one hundred yards from the treading yard where we were fanning. On hearing the fan stop, he left immediately, and came to the spot where we were. He hastily inquired what the matter was. Bill answered that I was sick, and there was no one to bring wheat to the fan. I had by this time crawled away under the side of the post-and-rail fence by which the yard was enclosed, hoping to find relief by  
30 getting out of the sun. He then asked where I was. He was told by one of the hands.

He came to the spot, and, after looking at me awhile, asked me what was the matter. I told him as well as I could, for I scarce had strength to speak. He then gave me a savage kick in the side, and told me to get up. I tried to do so, but fell back in the attempt. He gave me another kick, and again told me to rise. I again tried, and succeeded in gaining my feet; but, stooping to get the tub with which I was feeding the fan, I again staggered and fell. While down in this situation, Mr. Covey took up the  
40 hickory slat with which Hughes had been striking off the half-bushel measure, and with it gave me a heavy blow upon the head, making a large wound, and the blood ran freely; and with this again told me to get up. I made no effort to **comply**, having now made up my mind to let him do his worst. In a short time after receiving this blow, my head grew better. Mr. Covey had now left me to my fate.

At this moment I resolved, for the first time, to go to my master, enter a complaint, and ask his protection. In order to [do] this, I must that afternoon walk seven miles; and this,  
50 under the circumstances, was truly a severe undertaking. I was exceedingly feeble; made so as much by the kicks and blows which I received, as by the severe fit of sickness to which I had

been subjected. I, however, watched my chance, while Covey was looking in an opposite direction, and started for St. Michael's. I succeeded in getting a considerable distance on my way to the woods, when Covey discovered me, and called after me to come back, threatening what he would do if I did not come. I disregarded both his calls and his threats, and made my way to the woods as fast as my feeble state would allow; and thinking I might be overhauled by him if I kept the road, I walked through the woods, keeping far enough from the road to avoid detection, and near enough to prevent losing my way.

I had not gone far before my little strength again failed me. I could go no farther. I fell down, and lay for a considerable time. The blood was yet oozing from the wound on my head. For a time I thought I should bleed to death; and think now that I should have done so, but that the blood so matted my hair as to stop the wound. After lying there about three quarters of an hour, I nerved myself up again, and started on my way, through bogs and briers, barefooted and bareheaded, tearing my feet sometimes at nearly every step; and after a journey of about seven miles, occupying some five hours to perform it, I arrived at master's store. I then presented an appearance enough to affect any but a heart of iron. From the crown of my head to my feet, I was covered with blood. My hair was all clotted with dust and blood; my shirt was stiff with blood. My legs and feet were torn in sundry places with briers and thorns, and were also covered with blood. I suppose I looked like a man who had escaped a den of wild beasts, and barely escaped them.

In this state I appeared before my master, humbly entreating him to **interpose** his authority for my protection. I told him all the circumstances as well as I could, and it seemed, as I spoke, at times to affect him. He would then walk the floor, and seek to justify Covey by saying he expected I deserved it. He asked me what I wanted. I told him, to let me get a new home; that as sure as I lived with Mr. Covey again, I should live with but to die with him; that Covey would surely kill me; he was in a fair way

#### INFER

Why does Douglass ignore Covey's calls and threats (lines 54–62)?

#### INTERPRET

Re-read lines 73–79. What does Douglass mean when he says his appearance would move anyone but someone with a "heart of iron" (line 74)?

#### FLUENCY

Read the boxed passage aloud twice. During your first reading, concentrate on the punctuation marks that indicate where sentences begin and end, and where you should pause. During your second reading, try to bring the horror of Douglass's experience to life.

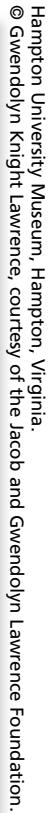
#### VOCABULARY

**interpose** (in'tər·pōz') v.: put forth in order to interfere.

[illegible]

Re-read lines 88–95. Circle the reasons Thomas gives for refusing to help Douglass.

for it. Master Thomas ridiculed the idea that there was any danger of Mr. Covey's killing me, and said that he knew Mr. Covey; that he was a good man, and that he could not think of taking me from him; that, should he do so, he would lose the whole year's wages; that I belonged to Mr. Covey for one year, and that



*The Life of Frederick Douglass* (1938–1939), No. 10, by Jacob Lawrence. "The master of Douglass, seeing he was of a rebellious nature, sent him to a Mr. Covey, a man who had built up a reputation as a "slave breaker." A second attempt by Covey to flog Douglass was unsuccessful. This was one of the most important incidents in the life of Frederick Douglass: He was never again attacked by Covey. His philosophy: A slave easily flogged is flogged oftener; a slave who resists flogging is flogged less." (17<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" × 12").



I must go back to him, come what might; and that I must not trouble him with any more stories, or that he would himself *get hold of me*. After threatening me thus, he gave me a very large dose of salts, telling me that I might remain in St. Michael's that night (it being quite late), but that I must be off back to Mr. Covey's early in the morning; and that if I did not, he would *get hold of me*, which meant that he would whip me.

100 I remained all night, and, according to his orders, I started off to Covey's in the morning (Saturday morning), wearied in body and broken in spirit. I got no supper that night, or breakfast that morning. I reached Covey's about nine o'clock; and just as I was getting over the fence that divided Mrs. Kemp's fields from ours, out ran Covey with his cowskin, to give me another whipping. Before he could reach me, I succeeded in getting to the cornfield; and as the corn was very high, it **afforded** me the means of hiding. He seemed very angry, and searched for me a long time. My behavior was altogether unaccountable. He finally  
110 gave up the chase, thinking, I suppose, that I must come home for something to eat; he would give himself no further trouble in looking for me. I spent that day mostly in the woods, having the alternative before me—to go home and be whipped to death, or stay in the woods and be starved to death.

That night, I fell in with Sandy Jenkins, a slave with whom I was somewhat acquainted. Sandy had a free wife who lived about four miles from Mr. Covey's; and it being Saturday, he was on his way to see her. I told him my circumstances, and he very kindly invited me to go home with him. I went home with him,  
120 and talked this whole matter over, and got his advice as to what course it was best for me to pursue. I found Sandy an old advisor.<sup>3</sup> He told me, with great **solemnity**, I must go back to Covey; but that before I went, I must go with him into another part of the woods, where there was a certain *root*, which, if I would take some of it with me, carrying it *always on my right side*, would

3. **an old advisor:** someone who can offer good advice.

## Notes

### IDENTIFY

Underline two choices, or alternatives, Douglass has now (lines 112–114).

### CLARIFY

Pause at line 119. What new person enters the narrative at this point?

### VOCABULARY

**afforded** (ə · fôrd'id) *v.*: gave; provided.

**solemnity** (sə · ləm'nə · tē) *n.*: seriousness.

## VOCABULARY

**render** (ren'dər) *v.*: make.

**singular** (sɪŋ'gyə·lər) *adj.*: remarkable.

**attributed** (ə·trib'yoot·id) *v.*: thought of as resulting from.

## CLARIFY

What surprises Douglass about Covey's conduct (lines 137–145)?

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## CLARIFY

Re-read lines 147–158. Underline what Covey does to Douglass. Then, underline Douglass's response.

## ANALYZE

Circle the **figure of speech** Douglass uses to describe Covey's reaction to his resistance (line 160). Is this comparison a **metaphor** or a **simile**? Explain.

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**render** it impossible for Mr. Covey, or any other white man, to whip me. He said he had carried it for years; and since he had done so, he had never received a blow, and never expected to while he carried it. I at first rejected the idea, that the simple carrying of a root in my pocket would have any such effect as he had said, and was not disposed to take it; but Sandy impressed the necessity with much earnestness, telling me it could do no harm, if it did no good. To please him, I at length took the root, and, according to his direction, carried it upon my right side. This was Sunday morning.

I immediately started for home; and upon entering the yard gate, out came Mr. Covey on his way to meeting. He spoke to me very kindly, made me drive the pigs from a lot nearby, and passed on toward the church. Now, this **singular** conduct of Mr. Covey really made me begin to think that there was something in the *root* which Sandy had given me; and had it been on any other day than Sunday, I could have **attributed** the conduct to no other cause than the influence of that root; and as it was, I was half inclined to think the *root* to be something more than I at first had taken it to be. All went well till Monday morning. On this morning, the virtue of the *root* was fully tested.

Long before daylight, I was called to go and rub, curry, and feed the horses. I obeyed, and was glad to obey. But while thus engaged, while in the act of throwing down some blades from the loft, Mr. Covey entered the stable with a long rope; and just as I was half out of the loft, he caught hold of my legs, and was about tying me. As soon as I found what he was up to, I gave a sudden spring, and as I did so, he holding to my legs, I was brought sprawling on the stable floor. Mr. Covey seemed now to think he had me, and could do what he pleased; but at this moment—from whence came the spirit I don't know—I resolved to fight; and, suiting my action to the resolution, I seized Covey hard by the throat; and as I did so, I rose. He held on to me, and I to him. My resistance was so entirely unexpected, that Covey seemed taken all aback. He trembled like a leaf.

This gave me assurance, and I held him uneasy, causing the blood to run where I touched him with the ends of my fingers. Mr. Covey soon called out to Hughes for help. Hughes came, and, while Covey held me, attempted to tie my right hand. While he was in the act of doing so, I watched my chance, and gave him a heavy kick close under the ribs. This kick fairly sickened Hughes, so that he left me in the hands of Mr. Covey.

170 This kick had the effect of not only weakening Hughes, but Covey also. When he saw Hughes bending over with pain, his courage quailed.<sup>4</sup> He asked me if I meant to persist in my resistance. I told him I did, come what might; that he had used me like a brute for six months, and that I was determined to be used so no longer. With that, he strove to drag me to a stick that was lying just out of the stable door. He meant to knock me down. But just as he was leaning over to get the stick, I seized him with both hands by his collar, and brought him by a sudden snatch to the ground. By this time, Bill came. Covey called upon him for assistance. Bill wanted to know what he could do. Covey said, "Take hold of him, take hold of him!" Bill said his master hired  
180 him out to work, and not to help to whip me; so he left Covey and myself to fight our own battle out. We were at it for nearly two hours. Covey at length let me go, puffing and blowing at a great rate, saying that if I had not resisted, he would not have whipped me half so much. The truth was, that he had not whipped me at all. I considered him as getting entirely the worst end of the bargain; for he had drawn no blood from me, but I had from him. The whole six months afterward, that I spent with Mr. Covey, he never laid the weight of his finger upon me in anger. He would occasionally say, he didn't want to get hold  
190 of me again. "No," thought I, "you need not; for you will come off worse than you did before."

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4. **quailed** v.: faltered.

## Notes

### IDENTIFY

Pause at line 173. Underline the reason Douglass gives for his determination to resist Mr. Covey.

### IDENTIFY

Pause at line 182. For how long did Covey and Douglass fight? Underline the words that tell you.

### IDENTIFY CAUSE & EFFECT

Pause at line 191. Underline the result, or effect, of the fight in the stable.



### VOCABULARY

**expiring** (ek · spīr'īn) *v.* used as *adj.*: dying.

### INTERPRET

Circle the **metaphor** Douglass uses to describe freedom (line 193). What truth does the comparison reveal?

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### COMPARE & CONTRAST

How does the **tone** of the final paragraph differ from the tone of the rest of the story?

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### IDENTIFY

Locate and circle another **metaphor**, in lines 200–201. What three comparisons does Douglass make in it?

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This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few **expiring** embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free. The gratification afforded by the triumph was a full compensation for whatever else might follow, even death itself. He only can understand the deep satisfaction which I experienced, who has himself repelled by force the bloody arm  
200 of slavery. I felt as I never felt before. It was a glorious resurrection,<sup>5</sup> from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom. My long-crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place; and I now resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact.

5. **resurrection** *n.*: coming back to life.



These people were formerly held in slavery.

***from* Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass**

**Reading Skills: Analyzing a Writer's Purpose** Complete this chart to show how Douglass supports his purpose, which is stated in the first paragraph of the text. First, state Douglass's purpose, using his own words. Then, find examples of description and narration that support his purpose. Also, find at least one strong metaphor that supports his purpose.

<b>Author's Purpose</b>	
<b>Use of Narration</b>	
<b>Use of Description</b>	
<b>Use of Strong Metaphors</b>	

# from Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass

## VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

### VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

**DIRECTIONS:** Write words from the Word Box in the blanks to complete the paragraph below. Not all words will be used.

#### Word Box

intimated  
comply  
interpose  
afforded  
solemnity  
render  
singular  
attributed  
expiring

Learning to read was a (1) \_\_\_\_\_ achievement for a slave. Douglass was (2) \_\_\_\_\_ the opportunity when he was sent to live in Baltimore, Maryland. He (3) \_\_\_\_\_ his first reading skills to Sophia Auld, the wife of his master, who taught him. When her husband discovered that Douglass could read, he was furious. At the time it was illegal to teach a slave to read. Hugh Auld was determined to (4) \_\_\_\_\_ with the law. The lessons stopped immediately, but Douglass's passion for learning was in no danger of (5) \_\_\_\_\_.

### CONTEXT CLUES

Underline the context clue that helps you guess at the meaning of each bold-face word below. Then, write the word's meaning in the space provided.



**Reading  
Standard 1.3  
(Grade 8  
Review)**

Use word meanings within the appropriate context and show ability to verify those meanings by definition, restatement, example, comparison, or contrast.

Context	Meaning
As I watched the trees <b>expiring</b> , I realized I could not let them die.	
The <b>solemnity</b> of the occasion was evident: Everyone was quiet and serious.	
She <b>intimated</b> that Sam lied, a hint that would cause her trouble later.	
The boy tried to <b>comply</b> with the order, but his mother refused to let him obey it.	



Check your Standards Mastery at the back of this book.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Selection: \_\_\_\_\_ Author: \_\_\_\_\_

## Metaphor

A **metaphor** is a figure of speech that makes a comparison between two seemingly unlike things without using a connective word such as *like*, *as*, *than*, or *resembles*.

DIRECTIONS: The chart below lists some of the types of metaphor. List examples of each type that you find in the selection.

Type of Metaphor	Example from Selection
<b>Explicit metaphors</b> state the comparison directly—for example: <i>Maria is the sunshine of my life.</i>	
<b>Implied metaphors</b> do not state the comparison directly—for example: <i>Maria shines upon all who meet her.</i>	
<b>Extended metaphors</b> develop the comparison with several examples—for example: <i>Maria arises each morning, bringing light into the world and warming all who meet her.</i>	

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